Archaeology of Ancient Greek Music
From Reconstructing Instruments to Deconstructing Concepts

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1 INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the plethora of implications, archaeology can carry in view of our knowledge about ancient Greek music. In the ‘classical’ historical-philological perspective, archaeology of music mainly involves (a) the organological study of remains of musical instruments and (b) the study of musical finds or representations from proto- and pre-historic contexts. Taking material culture as the point of departure expands the information beyond that traditionally derived from texts alone. It extends furthermore the perception beyond that imposed by historiography, which places ancient Greece at the beginnings of western written art music. Ethnographic analogies and critical theories confirm that this concept of ‘ancient Greek music’ carries with it important modern and ethnocentric assumptions. Comparative notions and methods are more adequate here and archaeology of music is well-disposed at their implementation. It supports both ultimate ambitions of (a) ‘reconstructing’ the musical instruments and the actual sounds of ancient Greek music and of (b) ‘deconstructing’ the modern ethnocentric assumptions shaping the historical concept of music we use and thus the knowledge about ‘ancient Greek music’ we produce. It promotes a ‘new’ and more adequate understanding of the music of ancient Greece from the empirical to the epistemological level.

2 ARCHAEOLOGY OF MUSIC

2.1 ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeology is usually defined as the study of the past through material culture. This includes not only ‘high’ art objects (sculpture, painting…), but any kind of artifact (tools, constructions…) or physical remains (vegetal traces, animal bones…) from past human behavior. The discipline embraces the study (logos) of past things (arkhai) in a general sense. Interest in archaeology arose during the Renaissance, when the antiquities of Greek and Roman culture were rediscovered and collected. Archaeological excavations started in 18th-century Italy in the Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculanenum. In the 19th century, the beginnings of Greek, Egyptian and Mesopotamian archaeology followed. Archaeology of the Americas, prehistoric archaeology, and the scientific method of archaeo-
ology are later successes of the 19th century. The principal development of the 20th century has been a shift of focus from the practice of collecting and classifying antiquities and 'objects' towards investigating more complex cultural and environmental problems and 'contexts'. Contemporary archaeology studies traces from any place or time and adopts practices and theories from a variety of cultural and natural sciences. It has been described as "anthropology in the past sense" to indicate that it encompasses the study of the human past in its totality.

Archaeology is paramount in the study of "proto"- and "pre"-historic phases of cultures that have left only material and environmental evidence. Conversely, 'historical' cultures that left textual evidence are traditionally the province of the discipline and perspective of historiography. Material evidence typically takes a secondary place here and is moreover primarily understood in the literary context. 'Classical' archaeology is an exemplary victim of this kind of obstacles and criticisms. The term 'classical' does not merely correspond here to the geographic period on which the archaeological research concentrates. It also involves a paradigm where the focus has remained on the antiquities to which the discipline owed its origins and where privilege is furthermore given to the texts to which Greek antiquity owes the established reputation of being the first 'historical' society. The paradigm of Hellenism has been granted the superiority to the disciplines of classical philology and ancient history. It also encouraged a bifurcated development of classical studies and archaeology that has isolated 'classical' archaeology. The Greek world has become a backwater for other archaeologists.

2.2 HISTORY OF MUSIC

The modern perception of history is principally engrafted on texts. This is not different in view of music. The history of music developed as a form of historiography specifically concerned with the western written tradition of music. It shares the basic task of textual source criticism with the historical disciplines. It furthermore displays the trait specific to art histories of arranging formal, stylistic and aesthetic developments according to epochs, styles, periods, or artists. Peculiar to it is a concern for matters of musical practice, instrumentation, composition, notation, theory, philosophy, aesthetics, pedagogy, etc. Again, classical Greece is placed at the beginnings of all this. Not only did it produce the 'first' literary and historical texts, it is widely reputed to have fostered the beginnings of scientific writing about music as well as of written documents with musical notation. The research is controlled by the historical-philological perspective and subsumed by the discipline of music history more specifically. This studies 'ancient Greek music' as a first form of music in the western fine art tradition and concentrates on musical text and documents and on the accomplishments of music theory, and on Athens most particularly. It is an extremely technical and specialist branch of advanced philological scholarship that other classicists generally ignore.

Historiography tends to reduce the past to what has been preserved in texts. However, successes and criticisms produced in other directions and disciplines have urged historical studies to open up to other sources (e.g., oral), methodologies (e.g., iconology), regions (e.g., Africa) and viewpoints (e.g., gender and feminism). Pluralism is the mainstay in contemporary historiography, ancient history included. Music history, concurrently, developed into 'historical musicology' and integrates sources and approaches from philology and historiography as well as from iconography, paleography, epigraphy, etc. Musicology furthermore expanded its scope beyond the history of western art music to include the study of music in non-western cultures (i.e., ethnomusicology) as well as of non-historical aspects of music (i.e., systematic musicology). A general shift of focus has occurred away from the unique 'product' of art music and towards 'processes' of musical performance taking place within larger natural and cultural environments. Interdisciplinary cross-fertilizations with modern disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, and sociology have played a fundamental role.
in these developments. New methods and theories are being developed and adopted in musicology this way up to the present time (e.g., bio-musicology, semiotics of music). Music is a virtually endless subject and its study is potentially interlocked with countless scientific approaches and branches9.

2.3 MUSICOLOGY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Amongst the various sources, methodologies and approaches that researchers currently adopt in the study of music are those from archaeology. There have always been scholars who have shown an interest in the material evidence of music, and in the remains of musical instruments most specifically. But archaeology of music as a distinct scholarly activity, partaking in musicology and archaeology and specialized in the scientific study of the material evidence of music, is a relatively young phenomenon and one that is still in development10. In keeping with the individual goals and wide scopes of its constitutive disciplines, archaeology of music encompasses many and multiple implementations with two natural limits. On the one extreme, it will consist of applying methodologies of musicology to the study of archaeological objects (e.g., organology). This line is essentially a musicological line of inquiry. On the other extreme, it will consist of applying archaeological methodologies to the study of music (e.g., excavation). This is principally an archaeological line of inquiry. The hybrid and ambivalent nature of the branch is also reflected in the loose and interchangeable use of different denominations such as “archaeo-musicology” or “music archaeology”, etc11.

Typically and ideally, the interdisciplinary cross-fertilizations between musicology and archaeology will proceed equally in both directions and result in different accents at most. This is my first reason for sticking to the more generic and open designation of “archaeology of music” here. It complies moreover with a fundamental element of profound ambiguity in that archaeology specializes in empirical study of material objects while the product of music is intrinsically immaterial. Musical instruments are its most direct and widely preserved materializations. The core activity in archaeology of music is hence the practice of excavating, identifying, dating, examining and classifying material remains and visual representations of ancient musical instruments. But the research can start with the discovery of any physical trace of musical behavior and it can lead all the way to investigating symbolism and cognition of music in specific geographic periods, or cross-culturally. It also includes other sources when available (i.e., texts) and it deals with issues of methodology and theory12. Archaeology of music can be described as anthropology of music in the past tense to indicate that it encompasses the scientific study of the music of the past in its totality13.

3 ARCHAEOLoGY OF ANCIENT GREEK MUSIC

3.1 CLASSICAL ORIENTATIONS

Archaeology of music, as can be expected, is paramount in the study of ‘proto’- and ‘pre’-historic musical cultures. Conversely, in the study of music in ancient Greece, reputedly the first ‘historical’ culture, the textual sources take the central place, the philological-historical approach prevails, and the material evidence is primarily studied from this perspective, too. This is my second reason for sticking to the denomination of “archaeology of music” here. In the study of ancient Greek music, archaeology is largely commensurate with history and specifies basically the integration of material evidence and of proto- and prehistoric periods into the inquiry. It is especially consequential in view of the study of organology and music prehistory.

3.1.1 Organology

Remains of musical instruments are paramount in the study of ancient Greek music. Besides documents with notation they are the most direct musical sources at our disposal. Musical instruments are the area of expertise of organology. This branch of musicology focuses on formal and technical characteristics and produces classifications of musical instruments14. Traditionally, we derive our organological knowledge of ancient Greek musical instruments primarily from descriptions found in writings from antiquity15. The information has been supplemented by countless representations found in classical art and iconography16. Discovery

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10 I.e., Duckles et al. 2001, 492–507, II “Disciplines of musicology” describes a dozen branches including iconography (II.3), socio-musicology (II.9), etc. Archaeology is not yet one of them. Yet, Hickmann 2001 offers a first reference article on the subject.
11 E.g., Hickmann 2001, 848, defines “Archaemusicology” with „Musikarchäologie” i.e., “Music Archaeology”, as its German counterpart. But in the bibliography she also makes reference to English work on “Music Archaeology”.
12 The goal and the program of the present conference will suffice to prove this.
13 I.e., Lund 1980, 1; „Vorgeschichtsmusikanthropologie“.
and organological study of archaeological remains of musical instruments have further advanced the inquiry in a variety of ways. They have expanded our empirical knowledge about the types and variety, the formal-technical and melodic properties, the scales and harmonies of the range of musical instruments\footnote{E.g., attempts have been made to infer from the disposition of the holes in surviving examples of ancient Greek auloi “double flutes” the notes and the intervals that they were designed to play, e.g., Hagel 2004.}. The material evidence also helped to put into perspective the limitations of the other categories of sources as well as of older interpretations that were based on a more limited corpus of material\footnote{E.g., the theory of Schlesinger (1939) explaining the rise of the Greek harmonies on account of the form, position and number of finger-holes in auloi is not consistent with the archaeological data discovered since, cf. West 1992, 96–101. The material is, however, also inconsistent with the imagery. Finger holes are rarely depicted in detail and when they are, accuracy is not compulsory.}. Hence, archaeologists of prehistoric music have developed wider systems of classification than those used in organology and musicology. As opposed to studying musical instruments in the narrow sense they set out to investigate any “sound-producing device” in specific and cross-cultural contexts\footnote{E.g., the reeds in the mouthpieces of auloi and in the pipes of the syrinx (‘panflute ’).}. This enlarged perception is a major implication and special merit of archaeology of music. In view of ancient Greek music, however, research tends to concentrate on musical instruments in an organological sense and to adopt the form and perspective mainly of historical musicology\footnote{I.e., the class of percussion instruments is highly problematic in this respect.}. 

### 3.1.2 Prehistory of music

Archaeology of ancient Greek music first developed when scholars started to integrate iconographical and material evidence into their inquiries of music history\footnote{Core publications are Lund 1980; Lund 1981.}. Historiography has a natural fascination with ‘historic-genetic’ questions and the material evidence notably allows a glimpse into the music of the earliest periods, for which there is no direct literary evidence. However, ancient authors never hesitated to give opinions on the origins and the development of music. The discovery and study of contemporary material evidence usefully qualifies the ‘literary’ picture of prehistory of ancient Greek music\footnote{E.g., Wegner 1949; Wegner 1963; Wegner 1968.}. The evidence consists most abundantly of musical representations in art, and the research primarily focuses on the information they supply about the types, functions and developments of musical instruments that are the principal defining features of music in imagery\footnote{E.g. the suspected development of strings in lyres from three or four in early times to seven or more from the time of Terpander is not supported by material evidence: West 1992, 62.}. Organology and iconography typically take the central place in ancient Greek music prehistory\footnote{I.e. imagery of dance is far more problematic in this respect.}.

The distinctive contribution from archaeology is generally limited to information about dates and functions derived from finding contexts (graves, temples...). A problem is that many of the finds of antiquity are without archaeological contexts. Moreover, Greek archaeology remains in itself primarily an archaeology of ‘objects’ rather than of contexts. It still mainly takes on the form and frame of history of ‘art’\footnote{Most textbooks make no clear distinction between ‘art’ and ‘archaeology’ and produce histories of Greek art from Minoan to Hellenistic times mainly, e.g. Biers 1996; Pedley 2008. For this criticism, cf. Alcock/Osborne 2007, esp. 2–8, stressing that this was the result of the impact of the ‘classical’ tradition and Hellenist ideology on scholarship.}.

Nevertheless, the rediscovery of the prehistory of ancient Greek music succeeded, albeit slowly, in shifting the traditional scholarly emphasis away from the texts and Athens. It furthermore extended the perception beyond that imposed by the historiographical perspective, which only placed ‘ancient Greek music’ at the beginnings of western written art music. Music prehistory revealed a strong continuity and extensive interactions between the music of ancient Greece and that of earlier Bronze Age civilizations in the Mediterranean East\footnote{Guillemín/Duchesne 1935 would claim that even the classically ‘Greek’ kithara was derived from the Ancient Near East.}. The paradigm of historicism had previously bestowed upon ancient Greece a unique position, but it
turned out not to be so unparalleled in the comparative perspective. The comparative approach first developed in the course of the 19th century in the study of ancient Greek religion and myth, easily recognizable as belonging to an older and more ‘primitive’ heritage that appeared indeed to be rooted in a broader Indo-European tradition and was on occasion retraceable to Paleolithic times or had been preserved in modern ‘folk’ culture and was also recognized in living non-western ‘ethnic’ cultures. The latter became the central focus of concern of the discipline of anthropology, which emerged as the principal achievement and embodiment of the comparative perspective and approach. The comparative methods and ethnographic techniques also gave a forceful impetus on the development and emancipation of both the branches of prehistoric/world archaeology and ethnomusicology. Ancient Greece, nevertheless, remained a privileged area of ‘classical’ scholarship controlled by the values and pursuits of philology and historiography. Greek scholars have been extremely slow to adopt the comparative approach and methods, especially in the study of music. They have long remained disinclined to retrace elements of ancient Greek music back to earlier Bronze Age civilizations. Moreover, they have tended to abstain from ethnographic parallels between the noble ‘art’ of ancient Greek music and ‘folk’ traditions in modern Greece. Musical analogies were first discovered and most successfully applied by scholars of ancient Greek poetry and literature. This radically changed the perception of ancient Greece, and also the study of ancient Greek music fundamentally started to change.

3.2 COMPARATIVE AND CRITICAL APPROACHES

Until not so long ago, ancient Greek literature was the sole province of historical-philological scholarship, which studies texts in their written form and focuses on editing manuscripts, producing translations and writing commentaries on matters of restitution, date, form, style, content, meaning, evolution, etc. In this view, Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey enjoy the reputation of being the first realizations of literature in the west. However, Milman Parry and Albert Lord (1960) found parallels for the extensive use of fixed expressions characteristic of Homer’s poetry in contemporary Serbo-Croatian folk song. They elaborated the theory that Homeric poetry, rather than a ‘literary’ achievement, was the result of enduring and extensive ‘oral’ compositions and performances similar to those of the narrative song traditions found in pre-literate societies. The ‘oral-formulaic’ theory revolutionized Homeric studies as well as classics in general. It caused a shift of focus away from the genius of the author and the intrinsic value of literary texts towards processes and contexts of their performances and reception. Furthermore, it incited a radical new perception of ancient Greek ‘literature’ – the essence of the ‘Greek’ primacy – as pertaining to the vast category of ‘oral’, ‘ethnic’ or ‘folk’ culture and akin to the ‘pre-literate’ societies studied in anthropology, rather than to ‘literate’ civilization cultivated in philology and historiography. The dethronement of Athens and philology is a first major implication. The aim to relocate and study ancient Greek culture within the complexity of its proper ethnographic characteristics and context is another. The paradigm of Hellenism had constructed the ancient Greeks – especially the classical Athenians – as an extraordinary people who ‘invented’ literature, philosophy, rationalism, democracy, and many other achievements and values emblematic of European civilization. However, even the rise to prominence of archaic and classical Greek culture proves to be heavily indebted to extensive interactions with the neighbors in the east. Ancient Greece is no first miracle of western culture and this realization caused a ‘revolution’ in the classical paradigm. The comparative methodologies are constitutive of the ‘new’ paradigm and they are gradually also taken up by modern scholars of ancient Greek music. Two ultimate implementations have a special association with archaeology of music. One is to produce playable reconstructions of the instruments and actual sounds of ancient Greek music. The other is to expose modern and ethnocentric assumptions in the concept and perception of ‘ancient Greek music’.

32 Cf. Burkert 1992. The ‘miracle’ or ‘revolution’ of ancient Greece has been recognized as a construct of scholarship rather than a historical reality, e.g. Goldhill/Osborne 2006.
33 It is the so-called ‘cultural’ or ‘anthropological’ turn in classics and ancient history to study ancient Greece in its own right and ethnographic context rather than following the traditions of European civilization. In the process, many foundational dichotomies of Hellenism have collapsed, e.g., literacy – orality, texts – images, historiography – anthropology, ‘us’ – ‘them’, etc., cf. Morley 2004. It encourages interdisciplinary contextual scholarship, cf. Morris 2002.
3.2.1 Reconstructing Ancient Greek Musical Instruments

Archaeology of music starts with musical finds and aims at reconstructing past musical cultures. Its supreme ambition, responsible also for much of its success and renown with the large public, lies in producing material reconstructions of musical instruments and reproducing the actual sounds of the music of the past\(^{34}\). Archaeology of music as ‘reconstruction’ of music is my third reason for sticking to this denomination here. It is an implementation of experimental-participatory methods that are commonly used in ethnomusicology, the branch of musicology that is primarily concerned with observing music in living non-western and pre-literate societies\(^{35}\). In historical contexts, archaeological remains of musical instruments are paramount to the endeavor. Other ingredients are ancient descriptions or representations and contemporary parallels. The process of materially reproducing ancient Greek instruments and performing on them adds a great deal to understanding their construction methods, playing techniques, melodic capabilities, etc. The approach has a unique capacity to allow us a glimpse into the physical sound qualities of the music actually performed on instruments, which, by its very nature, has been lost forever to our ears. Attempts to reconstruct ancient Greek music are not new. They started as soon as musical writings and text fragments with musical notation from antiquity were rediscovered. Modern performances of reconstructed pieces on reconstructed instruments are producing increasingly fine appropriations of the compositions and songs preserved in the musical documents\(^{36}\). Experimental performances also allow the reproduction of musical techniques and phenomena so far only known from ancient descriptions and depictions\(^{37}\). Modern techniques even allow restitution of ancient poetic performance techniques and finally give back to certain Greek literary ‘texts’ some of their fundamental oral and aural qualities\(^{38}\). The approach opens an important new perspective in the study of ancient Greek music.

3.2.2 Deconstructing the Concept of ‘Ancient Greek Music’

The musical dimensions in ancient Greek culture are far more extensive and fundamental than ever realized before and than addressed in the history of music alone. This perspective uses as its model music in the western fine art tradition. However, ethnomusicological parallels rather reveal structural similarities between ancient Greece and the ‘pre-literate’ societies studied in anthropology and ethnomusicology. The boundaries between music history and ethnomusicology are inadequate in the Greek context. Venturing beyond the pursuits and limitations of historiography, musicologists aspiring to a genuine ‘ethnomusicology’ of ancient Greece are now adopting not only its techniques but also its models and concepts. Ancient Greek music is better understood as pertaining to the vast anthropological category of ‘ethnic’ music rather than to the historical category of ‘art’ music\(^{39}\). The new perspective usefully shifts the focus away from musical aesthetics, philosophy, theory, notation... and brings into view many previously untouched problems such as regional musical traditions, interactions of Greek and Near Eastern music, survivals in modern folk traditions, etc.\(^{40}\) Archaeology of music has much to offer to this ‘new’ kind of anthropology of music in the ethno-graphic Greek context. Renouncing the classical penchant for objects and rather taking ‘material culture’ as their point of departure and venturing beyond ‘classical’ archaeology of ancient Greek music in narrowly seeking alliance with the more general branch of archaeology of ‘sound producing behavior’, Greek archaeologists are now developing a ‘new’ archaeology of music in ancient Greece in a broader sense\(^{41}\). The future and potential of this approach and line of inquiry is very promising.

\(^{34}\) Hickmann 2000, 1: „Hier setzt nun die Arbeit des Musikarchäologen ein: er identifiziert und klassifiziert das Artefakt, vermißt und beschreibt es. Im günstigsten Fall ist das vormals klingende Objekt spielbar, doch gehen alle Bemühungen dahin, ein Replikat anzufertigen, das dann auf Klangqualitäten hin weiter untersucht werden kann.“ („Here it is where the work of the music archaeologist begins: he identifies and classifies the artifact, measures and describes it. In the most favorable case the once sonorous object can be played, but all efforts are aimed at fabricating a replica whose tonal quality can then be investigated“).

\(^{35}\) Cf. Pegg et al. 2001.

\(^{36}\) Cf. the research and website on Ancient Greek music by Stefan Hagel <http://www.oeaw.ac.at/kal/agm/>.

\(^{37}\) E.g., in aulos music, higher registers were used for the purpose of a special effect called syrignmos: ‘whistling’. It was used, e.g., to imitate the shrill sounds of the Python snake, so texts say. We can appreciate this much better through sound examples produced, e.g., aulos fragment 4 by Stefan Hagel produced on a reconstructed Hellenistic aulos cf. <http://www.oeaw.ac.at/kal/agm/> (25 August, 2008).

\(^{38}\) Cf. the research and website on Homeric singing by Georg Danek and Stefan Hagel <http://www.oeaw.ac.at/kal/sh/>.

\(^{39}\) Italian classicists have been leading the way, e.g., Restani 2006. Cf. also West 1992.

\(^{40}\) Cf. also West 1992.

\(^{41}\) ‘Agean’ archaeologists led the way by integrating approaches, methods and findings from prehistoric archaeology and ethnomusicology in the study of music in Bronze Age Greece, e.g., Kolotourou 2003; Kolotourou 2007. Recently also ‘classical’ archaeologists started to develop a ‘new’ archaeology of ‘contexts’ as opposed to ‘objects’ of music in classical Greece, e.g., Bellia 2005 and her paper at this conference.
Since ancient Greece has been recognized as an oral performance culture, classical scholarship has been confronted with the need to reassess and rethink also its perception of and approach to music. Many highly valued aspects of ancient Greek culture possessed intricate musical qualities and pertained indeed to the wider category of Mousike. This has escaped notice due to the scholarly prerogative of the study of ‘ancient Greek music’ in the narrow sense. The word ‘music’ derives from the Greek word Mousike, but we must not be misled. The segregation and the concept of ‘music’ are entirely modern and moreover pernicious to properly understanding music in ancient Greece. The Mousike were the “the arts of the Muses”. These included intricate cultural practices (consisting of music, poetry, dance and others) that were inseparable from the wider social context (politics, cult, myth). Breaking down the traditional boundaries in scholarship, an increasingly wide range of ancient historians is now engaging in the study of music and investigating the history of Mousike in the broad sense. The approach from archaeology helps to advance this research on the empirical as well as on the epistemological level. As ‘archaeology of knowledge’ it aims to expose the cultural and scholarly assumptions shaping the concept of music we use and thus the knowledge about ancient Greek music we produce. Hellenists have long failed to appreciate the conceptual and contingent element in scholarship. However, the impact of modern values is undeniable in classical scholarship. The comparative findings and approach have exposed the ethnocentric and reductive nature of the paradigm of Hellenism as well as of the specific concept of ‘ancient Greek music’. It is a modern category of interpretation imposed on the ancient world that does not correspond to ancient reality as such. The concept of ‘archaeology’ can be usefully elaborated to carry out a critical assessment of the interpretational and epistemological foundations and problems involved in the scholarly concept and perception of ‘ancient Greek music’. Archaeology of music as critical ‘epistemology’ of the concept and the study of ‘ancient Greek music’ is my final reason for sticking to this denomination here.

4 CONCLUSION

The approach of archaeology has fundamental capacities leading beyond the pursuits and the limitations of the ‘classical’ historical perspective and perception of ancient Greek music. Particularly disposed to adopt comparative and critical findings and theories, it can promote a ‘new’ understanding of musical behavior in the ancient Greek ethnographic context all the way from the empirical to the epistemological level, capturing moreover their intrinsic interrelatedness. Our knowledge of ‘ancient Greek music’ depends on the sources and the evidence as much as on the concepts and the framework we use. Archaeology as anthropology of music is an approach with many and multiple prospects on various levels in the study of ancient Greece.

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